



Montgomery County, 2025

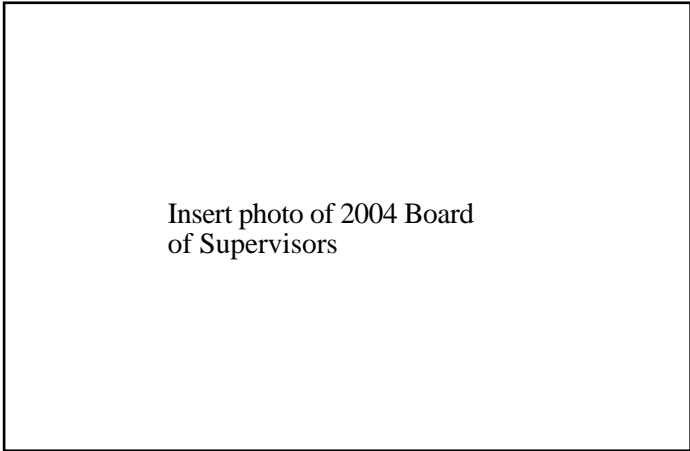
-Adopted 12 October 2004

Montgomery County, 2025

Montgomery County Comprehensive Plan

The Montgomery County Board of Supervisors acknowledges the participation in the comprehensive planning process by many County residents. Their interest in the County's future is to be commended. Each of us can make a difference. Our individual efforts do contribute towards the betterment of the entire community.


The unfortunate passing of Kitty Brennan recently brought this message home to Montgomery County. Kitty enriched the County through her efforts as a member of the Planning Commission, as a resident of Riner, and as an active participant in community life. She set an example that others can follow.



Insert photo of 2004 Board
of Supervisors

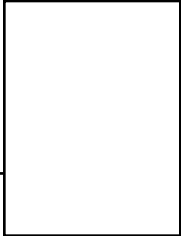
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Copies of *Montgomery County, 2025* online and in cd-rom form. Please contact the Montgomery County Department of Planning and GIS Services for current web and cd-rom information. The department can be contacted at 755 Roanoke Street, Suite 2A; Christiansburg, VA 24073-3177

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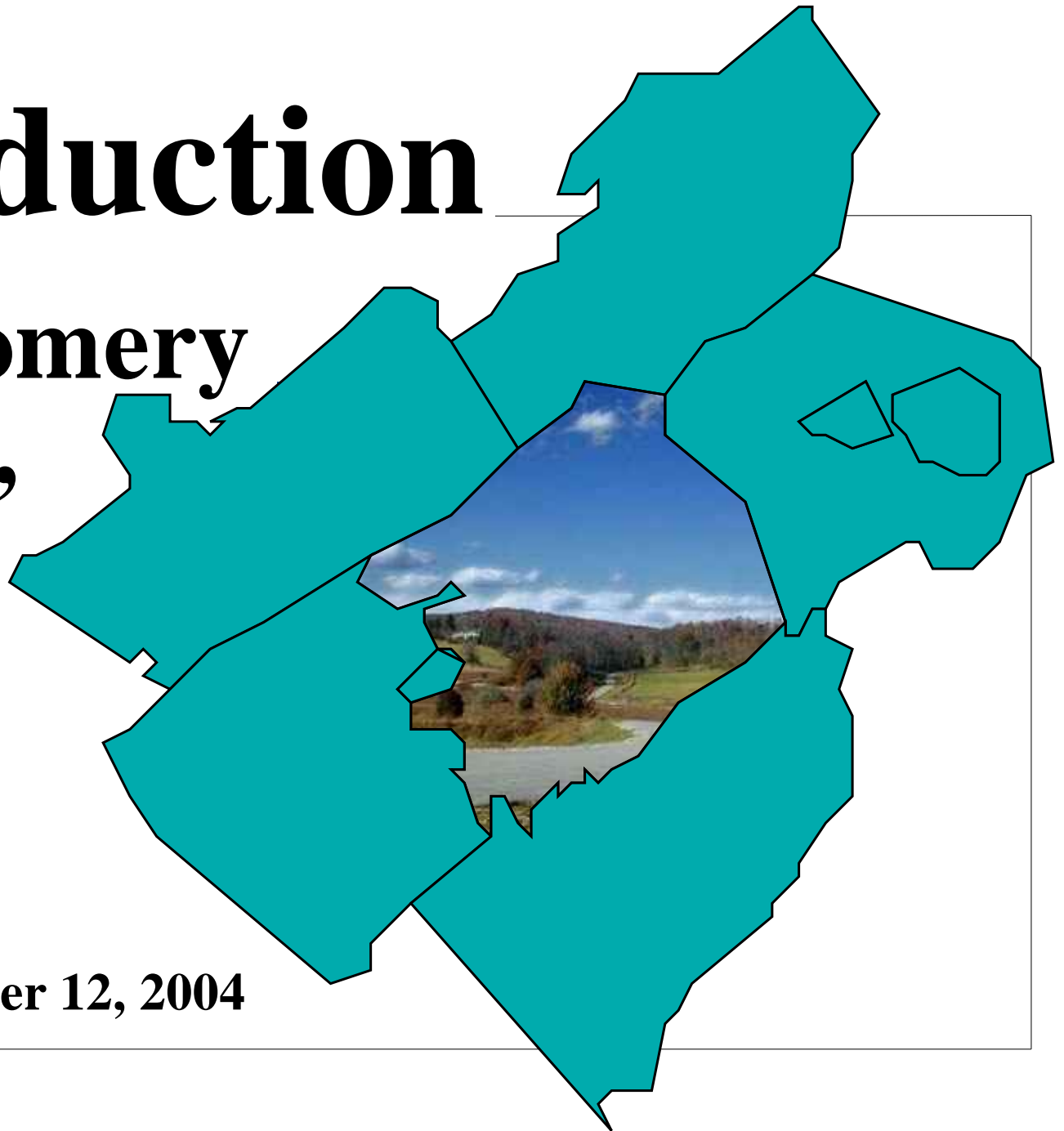
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Introduction

Montgomery County, 2025



Adopted October 12, 2004

Introduction: Executive Summary

Montgomery County, 2025 marks a bellwether change in how Montgomery County approaches planning and development, by focusing on three key features of proactive planning: stewardship of resources, participatory planning, and regionalism. These features are woven throughout the plan and provide the basic framework for planning in the future. This introduction discusses these features, as well as the legal basis for comprehensive planning in Virginia, the comprehensive planning process, and a brief overview of implementation and amendment policies.

Keep in mind, as you are reading the documents included in the print and interactive versions of *Montgomery County, 2025*, that a plan is, essentially a policy document, designed to guide growth and the decision making process. It is meant to change and be changed, a living document that provides both a map for the future and a reference point for current and future land use proposals.

Introduction

If you drove from Blacksburg to Christiansburg, in 1970, you would have seen Corning on right and a small strip mall, anchored by a Cheds store, on the left. While there were houses edging 460, the majority of the land was still agricultural, and the town edges were still reasonably well defined. Riner and Prices Fork were small villages, surrounded by farm land, and separated from the more populated areas of the county by narrow two-lane roads and reasonably light traffic. The only golf courses were located in or near Blacksburg and

Christiansburg. Aside from the Radford Arsenal and Corning, the only major industrial parks were located in Blacksburg and Christiansburg. Indeed, the economy was defined by the Arsenal, agriculture, and the two universities, (Virginia Tech and Radford University, located in the adjacent city of Radford). Virginia Tech was in the midst of rapid expansion, following the change from an all-male military institution to a co-ed university. While there were new subdivisions being built, most were located in Blacksburg and Christiansburg.



In 1970, the population of Montgomery County was 47,157. By 2000, the population of Montgomery County had grown to 83,629, a 77% increase. The farmland separating Blacksburg and Christiansburg vanished, replaced by urban growth patterns. The edges of the two towns and the villages of Riner and Prices Fork were no longer distinct, changed and obscured by residential growth. The commercial centers, once located in the downtowns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg, shifted to an expanding mall area between the two towns, on the northern border of Christiansburg. The Virginia Department of Transportation constructed a new bypass from I-81 to Blacksburg to reroute traffic from the increasingly congested 460 corridor, while deferring other road repairs and expansions. Between 1975 (the first year the records were available) and 2000, the total vehicle miles per 24 hour period increased 266%, from 689,580 miles to 1,834,637 miles. (1) Finally, the economy and labor market shifted away from the arsenal and increasingly towards retail and commercial enterprises and a growing corporate research center, located at Virginia Tech. Indeed, the only constants were rapid growth, change, and the continuing impact of Virginia Tech.

In 1973, Montgomery County adopted the first of a series of comprehensive plans, each more detailed than the last. Each of the comprehensive plans focused, to one degree or another, on the need for ongoing stewardship of county resources; however the ordinances and other legal mechanisms designed to implement the plan did not always accomplish the intended goals. This problem was, perhaps, most notable in the rapid expansion of

1. Virginia Department of Transportation. (2004) Statistical information is available from the VDOT website. Data prior to 1975 was not available.

subdivisions into areas of the County where public water and sewer and other county services were either not available or less than adequate, or where the environment was incapable of handling the level of demand placed on it. The results of this growth also meant more over crowding in schools, increased impacts to ground and surface water supplies, and increased traffic on substandard roads.

Changes in the Subdivision Ordinance in 1994 and the adoption of major amendments to the Zoning Ordinance in 1999, shifted Montgomery County's approach to planning and development from reactive to proactive.

The Nature of Plans

Comprehensive plans are written to address the long-range development of a community, a county, or a region. They focus primarily on land use and land quality issues: where to locate industrial, commercial, or residential growth; how to protect the physical and historical environments; and where to site the nuts and bolts infrastructure (schools, roads, water and sewer lines, parks, and other community facilities). The key, however, to understanding and guiding long-range development is to understand the terms "development" and "long-range."



Photo by C. Lindstrom

Development can be defined in two ways--as growth and as change. How growth and change are accomplished can be either positive or negative, proactive or reactive, ongoing or static, and managed or unmanaged. Long range plans are meant to provide a guide for the ongoing, proactive management of future growth and change in order to guarantee positive conditions and create and maintain a livable and sustainable community, for current and future residents.

"Long range" planning means that a jurisdiction and its residents are looking at change and development as it impacts multiple generations. Each generation covers roughly a twenty to twenty-five year span. High school students in 2004 will be raising their own families in twenty years; their parents will either be retirement age or in their final years of employment; their younger siblings will be entering the job market; and their children will be populating the schools. A "long-range" plan is a roadmap for the development of a place, a community, a county from one generation to the next. It defines the kind of place in which we want to live and of which we want to pass on to the next generation preparing the next plan.

Proactive Planning

Proactive planning, in Montgomery County, requires that two things occur at the same time. 1) that the County adopt a focused growth policy, built on the concept of stewardship, which works with the communities to provide high quality development opportunities while managing and maintaining current and future built and natural resources; and 2) that the County adopt and maintain planning tools which facilitate the implementation of the plan over the long term.

Proactive planning provides clear guidelines for managing the county's resources in such a way as to make them available now and well into the future. It also means that the County must continually maintain and revise not only



Photo by Robert Parker

the comprehensive plan but also the tools which implement the plan. As noted in the discussion of the legal basis for comprehensive planning, later in this chapter, state law provides the county with a number of legal mechanisms for implementing *Montgomery County, 2025*, including: zoning ordinance, subdivision ordinance, the capital improvements program, and the 2232 review process. However, the plan and the tools must be created and maintained in tandem.

Proactive planning requires rethinking not only the mechanisms of planning, but the process of planning as well. The process of planning is essentially the approach to planning: in short, how planning is accomplished in community terms. *Montgomery County, 2025* embodies a focused growth approach to planning, which goes beyond merely focusing growth in certain

portions of the County, most notably in the Villages, Village Expansion Areas, and the Urban Expansion Areas. It also means focusing planning efforts on the stewardship of built and natural resources, on participatory planning, and on finding, where possible and appropriate, regional approaches and solutions to planning related issues.

Stewardship of Resources

Resources are defined as the natural and built (man-made) assets which help to create and maintain the quality of life in Montgomery County, including: cultural and historical sites and facilities; jobs, businesses, and industries; schools and educational opportunities; land, air, and water quality; agriculture and forestry; housing, neighborhoods, and villages; medical and mental health facilities; human and social services; parks and recreational opportunities;

public safety; roads and alternative modes of transportation; and solid waste disposal and public water and sewer. Indeed, the wealth of the County is in its assets. (2)

Stewardship is the long range creation, use, management, and conservation of the County's assets. Resource stewardship is a management approach which requires looking at the use of resources both in the short term (five years or ten years), and in the long term (twenty, thirty, or fifty years), acknowledging that what is done now will have significant and long term impacts, costs, and benefits. (3)

Participatory Planning

Participatory planning assumes, first, that planning is never done in a vacuum. Planning decisions, whether the location of new development, the design of a neighborhood, or the construction of public infrastructure (roads, sewer, water, and so forth), have very real impacts beyond the immediate development. A new subdivision, for example, may create additional traffic on a road, add new students to an already overcrowded school, or place additional stress on other

2. Each of these types of assets is reflected in different chapters in this plan. Land use based assets, including Villages, Village Expansion, Urban Expansion, and Resource Stewardship areas are included in the Planning and Land Use Chapter. Different types of assets are dealt with in the remaining chapters, including Government and Planning Resources, Cultural Resources, Educational Resources, Economic Resources, Environmental Resources, Health and Human Resources, Housing Resources, Parks and Recreational Resources, Public Safety Resources, Transportation Resources, and Utility Resources.

3. As noted later in this chapter, there are a number of legal mechanisms, provided under the Code of Virginia, to help jurisdictions manage and maintain assets: the capital improvements program for community assets, including schools and other public facilities; and the zoning and subdivision ordinance for the creation and long-term management of new developments, small communities, villages, and urbanized areas, as well as the County as a whole.

public facilities. The removal of a community facility, such as a park or a school, can undermine the sense of community within a village, just as the addition of a community facility can spur the development of a more cohesive sense of place.

Second, participatory planning assumes that planning is best accomplished when the stakeholders (those who are either directly or indirectly impacted by change) both understand what is at issue and have a say in the outcome. Participatory planning relies on public outreach and education (4) on the one hand and public participation (5) on the other. It encourages citizens to become actively involved in their neighborhoods, their communities, and their county, and requires that the County create ongoing opportunities for education and participation.

4. *Montgomery County, 2025* provides a wide variety of public outreach and education mechanisms, including traditional (newsletters, public service announcements, press releases, and information data sheets), nontraditional (websites, broadcast of public hearings, and other e-government opportunities), and interactive (Planner in the Public Schools program, public workshops and citizen academies) approaches. While references to these approaches are mentioned in many of the chapters, the subject is covered, most prominently, in the Planning and Government.

5. Traditionally, public participation has been limited to two primary approaches: community meetings and public hearings. While both of these approaches are maintained in this plan, other public participation mechanisms are also included, including the introduction of village and the continuation of corridor planning, the community facilitators program, community/citizen advisory committees (CACs), and e-government-based participation opportunities (email and web-based surveys). As with community outreach and education, community participation is included in most of the chapters, although the primary references are included in Planning and Government.

Regionalism

In 1941, the Radford Arsenal was built in Montgomery and Pulaski Counties, on farmland on the banks of the New River. Not only did the location of the Arsenal remove a significant portion of farmland from production, farmland was also lost in both Montgomery and Pulaski Counties to the housing developments necessary to accommodate new workers and their families. The placement of the Arsenal increased traffic in both counties; required expansion of the housing stock in Radford, Fairlawn, and Airport Acres in Blacksburg, as well as the area immediately surrounding the plant. In addition, it increased the need for goods and services in the city of Radford and in Pulaski and Montgomery Counties.

While not always the case, the impact of development decisions often crosses jurisdictional boundaries. Choices made in Blacksburg and Christiansburg are felt in the County; choices by the County are felt within the two towns, in Radford, and in surrounding counties. This is especially true when the decisions involve economic development, utilities, or natural resources, such as watersheds.

Although regionalism is nothing new to Montgomery County (6), as evidenced by the

6. In addition to the NRVPCD, Montgomery County has participated in a number of cooperative planning efforts with surrounding jurisdictions, including: the Telecommunications Tower Agreement (with Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Radford, and Pulaski County), the Rt. 177 Corridor Plan (with Radford), New River Community College (with Radford and the counties of Pulaski, Floyd, and Giles), the New River Airport, solid waste disposal, and economic development initiatives. The Huckleberry Trail (Blacksburg, Christiansburg, and Montgomery County) exemplifies more localized cooperative planning efforts.

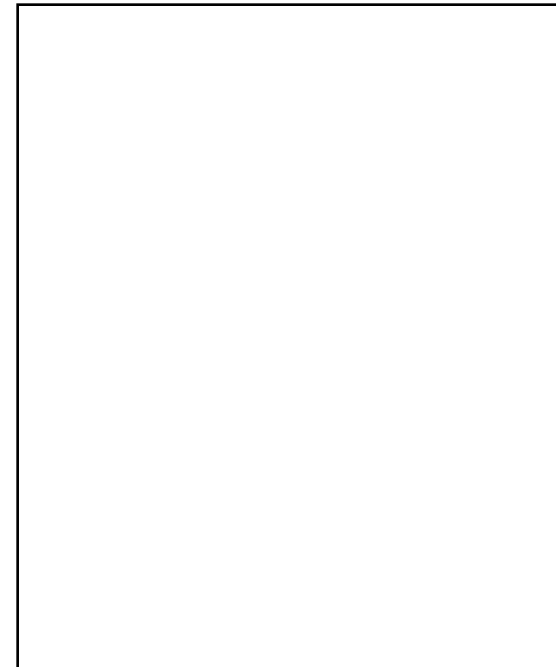
County's participation in New River Valley Planning District Commission (NRVPDC), the official recognition of Montgomery County as part of multiple regions is recent. The designation of Montgomery County as part of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), following the 2000 Census, marks federal recognition of the County as part of a transportation region and an economic impact region.

Montgomery County's regional connections and the potential for cooperative efforts does not stop with the New River Valley. Higher education, transportation, tourism and economic development, and environmental concerns have created significant ties between Montgomery County and the Roanoke Valley. (7)

Regionalism is based on two assumptions: 1) development and change create externalities (impacts, costs, and benefits) which do not

7. The NRVPCD defines Montgomery County as part of a geographic region (including the towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg, the city of Radford, and the counties of Pulaski, Floyd, and Giles) based its proximity to the New River and the reach of its economic, social, and cultural impact. Following the 2000 Census, the federal government designated Montgomery County as part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), based on economic patterns, and a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), based on transportation patterns. The MSA also includes Blacksburg, Christiansburg, the city of Radford, and Pulaski and Giles Counties. Other examples of regional definitions, imposed by external organizations, include state and federal voting districts, state economic development and tourism regions, and various environmental and agricultural regions (Extension District, National Forest District, Conservation Districts, and Recreation Districts). Finally, the County is defined, at least in part, by regions imposed by natural features (mountain ranges, valleys, and watersheds) and by transportation corridors (U.S. 460/Rt. 11, I-81, Rt. 8, and Rt. 114).

always adhere to jurisdictional boundaries; and 2) there is strength in numbers. Some issues, such as telecommunications towers, utilities (drinking water, solid waste, sewerage), transportation, and housing are more likely to be successfully addressed on a regional basis than by individual jurisdictions. In addition, regional and cooperative approaches are more likely to be successfully funded through grants and other external funding sources. Incorporating a regional approach to planning in Montgomery County enables the County to seek, where appropriate, regional approaches and solutions to issues and opportunities.



Legal Basis for Comprehensive Planning

Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

According to the Code of Virginia, "comprehensive plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants." (§15.2-2223). Generally, county comprehensive plans apply only to the unincorporated areas of the county, although state law does allow counties to include planning of incorporated towns in the county plan if the planning commission determines that it is related to planning for unincorporated areas or the county as a whole... [The plan, however,] is not considered a comprehensive plan for the town unless adopted by the town's governing body." (§15.2-2231). The reverse is true, as well. For an example of an "extraterritorial" chapter, see the Blacksburg Comprehensive Plan. The Blacksburg chapter does not, however, function as a comprehensive plan for the extraterritorial areas in the County, because the chapter was not adopted by the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors.

As was noted in the 1990 Comprehensive Plan, the plan serves a number of specific functions:

Statement of County Policy: The plan is a statement of the community's goals, or "what the community wants." It offers a vision of what might be. It also identifies shorter-term policies and strategies that will lead to achievement of the goals.

Guide to Decision Making: The plan is a means of guiding and influencing a variety of public and private decisions that eventually create the future county. The

regular ongoing public decision making process included land use cases (rezoning, special use permits, subdivisions, etc.), capital improvement programming, specific capital expenditures and other decisions. These decisions can be made on an ad hoc basis or they can be made in light of the comprehensive plan. A more effective, efficient, and attractive county will result when a plan is carefully developed and used to guide decision making.

Long Range Perspective: The orientation of this comprehensive plan is 23 years into the future. A long-range plan allows decision-makers to look at current decisions in light of their long-term consequences and in terms of their impacts on other related systems. The county will live with today's decisions for many years into the future.

Promoting the Public Interest: The plan is based upon facts and conclusions developed through background studies and discussions. The comprehensive planning process is open to all residents of the county. This helps promote the interest of all persons rather than the interest of individuals or special interest groups. Decisions based on a plan are less likely to be made in an arbitrary or capricious manner.

Technical Expertise and Advice: The comprehensive plan provides policy makers such as the Board of Supervisors with the opportunity to receive the counsel of its advisors in a coherent, unified form. The coordination of technical studies and advice with the political decision making process is necessary to bring about the

desired growth and development in accordance with the plan in the most efficient and economic manner.

Communication: Through the comprehensive plan, the Board of Supervisors presents a unified picture of its long range goals, policies, and strategies to all those concerned with the county's growth and development. That audience includes county departments, commissions, and agencies, neighboring jurisdictions, the private development community, civic organizations, and the general public. The plan enables the actors in the development process to anticipate decisions of the Board and to develop projects supportive of the plan rather than in conflict with it.

Education: The plan is educational for all actors in the development process and anyone who reads it. It should arouse interest in community affairs and offer information on both present conditions and probable future trends. It should encourage participation in the comprehensive planning process.

Legal Document: In recent years, court decisions have strengthened greatly the importance of the plan as a legal document. Planning has become central to questions of growth and development from the standpoint of both the courts and policy-making bodies.

Preparation of the Comprehensive Plan

Under the Code of Virginia, local governing bodies (the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors) are required to adopt a comprehensive plan for the physical

development of jurisdiction. The preparation of the comprehensive plan, however, falls to the local planning commission and, by extension, the planning office. The state statute governing the preparation and adoption specifies a number of specific activities related the comprehensive planning process, including:

The planning commission is charged with surveying and studying a broad range of topics in the preparation of the comprehensive plan, including:

1. Land use
2. Agricultural and forestal preservation
3. Production of food and fiber
4. Characteristics and conditions of existing development
5. Trends of growth or changes
6. Natural resources
7. Historic areas
8. Ground water
9. Surface water
10. Geologic factors
11. Population factors
12. Employment
13. Environmental and economic factors,
14. Existing public facilities
15. Drainage
16. Flood control and flood damage prevention measures
17. Transportation facilities
18. The Need for affordable housing in both the Locality and the planning district within which it is situated (New River Valley)
19. Additional matters related to the subject matter and general purposes of the comprehensive plan

Both historic resources and mineral resources carry additional requirements. If the jurisdiction chooses not to study either or both in the preparation of the comprehensive plan, then the available surveys from the applicable state departments must be included in the

comprehensive plan. In addition, all plans adopted after January 1, 1981 must include a study of the production of food and fiber.

The Code of Virginia explicitly lays the state's expectations and requirements for a locality's comprehensive plan:

"The comprehensive plan shall be general in nature, in that it shall designate the general or approximate location, character, and extent of each feature shown on the plan and shall indicate where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be extended, widened, removed, relocated, vacated, narrowed, abandoned, or changed in use as the case may be.

The plan, with the accompanying maps, plats, charts, and descriptive matter, shall show the locality's long-range recommendations for the general development of the territory covered by the plan. It may include, but need not be limited to:

1. The designation of areas for various types of public and private development and use, such as different kinds of residential, business, industrial, agricultural, mineral resources, conservation, recreation, public service, flood plain and drainage, and other areas;
2. The designation of a system of transportation facilities such as streets, roads, highways, parkways, railways, bridges, viaducts, waterways, airports, ports, terminals, and other like facilities;
3. The designation of a system of community service facilities such as parks, forests, schools, playgrounds, public buildings and institutions, hospitals, community centers, waterworks, sewage disposal or waste disposal areas, and the like;

4. The designation of historical areas and areas for urban renewal or other treatment;
5. The designation of areas for the implementation of reasonable ground water protection measures;
6. An official map, a capital improvements program, a subdivision ordinance, a zoning ordinance and zoning district maps, mineral resource district maps and agricultural and forestal district maps, where applicable;
7. The location of existing or proposed recycling centers; and
8. The designation of areas for the implementation of measures to promote the construction and maintenance of affordable housing, sufficient to meet the current and future needs of residents of all levels of income in the locality while considering the current and future needs of the planning district within which the locality is situated." (15.2-2223)

Adopting the Comprehensive Plan--Public Hearing Requirements:

In order to adopt the new comprehensive plan, both the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors must hold a public hearing prior to adoption (or for the meeting where adoption is likely to occur). A legal notice must be published in newspapers with local circulation once a week for the two successive weeks prior to the meeting. The notice needs to contain a descriptive summary of the proposed action and "a reference to the place or places within the locality where copies of the proposed plans, ordinances or amendments may be examined." (15.2-2204[A]).

The Comprehensive Planning Process

In 1990, Montgomery County adopted a new Comprehensive Plan, which was meant to guide growth for the final decade of the 20th century. Some of the goals, objectives, and policies included in the 1990 Comprehensive Plan reflected those included in the two previous Comprehensive Plans (1977 and 1983) and are continued in *Montgomery County, 2025*, including issues of affordable housing, environmental protection, and preservation of agriculture and agricultural lands.

As Montgomery County has grown from 29,780 in 1950 to 47,157 in 1970 to 83,629 in 2000, the issues Montgomery County has faced have also grown, both in number and complexity. The challenges for those who live and work in Montgomery County are: how do we define the issues we face; how do we frame the goals, objectives, and policies to address these issues; and to what degree can we come together in order to produce a Comprehensive Plan reflective of our common values.

In 2000, Montgomery County started the process of preparing a new comprehensive plan. The changes over the previous 25 years required that the comprehensive plan be more

than a simple update. The population, on the whole, is far more diverse, and the issues facing the County are far more complex than they were in 1975 when the county first started thinking in terms of long range planning. Rather than repeating the processes used in 1977, 1983, and 1990, the Planning Commission and the Planning Department embarked on a whole new approach, an approach that relied heavily on the provision of public information and encouraging public participation and input. Indeed, *Montgomery County, 2025* is a community-driven comprehensive plan.

Phase I: Community Meetings and Public Information

Phase I of the comprehensive planning process involved the use of traditional

community meetings and a community survey to define the parameters of the debate and the use of the Planning Commission newsletter, *News and Notes*, to explain the process and the issues facing the County.

Community Meetings and the Community Survey

Community meetings were held in each of the four planning districts: Shawsville (Shawsville Middle School), Riner (Auburn High School), Mt. Tabor (Slusher's Chapel), and Prices Fork (Prices Fork Grange). In addition, a community survey was published in both the *Roanoke Times* and the *Montgomery New Messenger*, and printed copies of the survey were distributed at the County's solid waste collection facilities. Participants in the

2001 Community Meetings and Community Survey

Location/ Response Type	Number of Participants
Mount Tabor--Slushers Chapel--Community Meeting	34
Shawsville Middle School--Community Meeting	11
Riner--Auburn High School--Community Meeting	28
Prices Fork--Prices Fork Grange--Community Meeting	10
Mail-In Community Survey	48
Total Participants	131

Top 3 Responses, by Question

Question	Top Response	2nd Response	3rd Response
Likes	Natural Environment	Character of Place	Quality of Life
Dislikes	Transportation	Planning/Zoning	Sprawl/Overdevelopment
Issues	Open Space/Farmland Protection	Growth / Development	Transportation / Traffic

Responses to the question concerning solutions were not categorized using the same method because of the variety of suggestions.

community meetings and on the surveys were asked the same four questions:

- 1) What do you like about Montgomery County?
- 2) What do you dislike about Montgomery County?
- 3) What are the three most important issues Montgomery County faces?
- 4) What are some possible solutions to these issues?

In the four meetings, participants were separated into groups and worked with a facilitator to generate lists of responses to each question. Their responses were analyzed using content analysis which catalogued individual responses (through the examination of keywords and phrases) into subject groups.

While public participation in the community meetings and the initial survey was a bit thin, the responses provided the County with a starting point for the comprehensive planning process. (7)

Public Outreach: News and Notes

Coinciding with the community meetings, the Planning Department began publishing a series of articles on comprehensive planning, planning issues (agriculture), and planning tools (capital improvements program) in order to provide information to the public and help spur public interest in and understanding of the comprehensive planning process.

Phase II: Working with a Consultant

In 2001, Montgomery County contracted with Herd Planning and Design to provide planning assistance during the comprehensive planning process. Herd Planning and Design

7. Complete survey results, analysis or results, and the raw data from the surveys and the community meetings are available, upon request, from the Montgomery County Planning Department.

Community Meetings, 2002: Herd Planning & Design

Date / Subject / Location	Number of Participants
4/25/02 - Community and Public Facilities/ County Government Center	49
6/27/02 - Interjurisdictional Planning: Opportunities and Issues/ County Government Center	35
9/10/02 - Agriculture and Open Space Preservation/ 2 Meetings-Prices Fork Grange and Auburn High School (Riner)	50
Total Number of Participants	134

was already familiar with Montgomery County, having previously worked on the zoning ordinance the County adopted in 1999. (8)

Between 2001 and 2003, Herd Planning and Design produced five reports for Montgomery County: 1) Review of Montgomery County Planning Documents; 2) Review and Coordination of Other Local Comprehensive Plans; 3) Report on 15.2-2232 Reviews; 4) Review and Evaluation of Cash Proffers; and 5) Review and Evaluation of Land Conservation Tools. (9)

A series of three community meetings were held in conjunction with these reports to discuss by Herd Planning and Design: 1) public and community facilities; 2) cooperative planning opportunities and challenges facing Montgomery County, Blacksburg, and Christiansburg; and 3) agricultural and open space preservation.

Phase III: Examining the Application of Indicators

Montgomery County wanted to examine the use of indicators, connected to the comprehensive plan, to allow the County to track progress and changes, while also providing

8. The consulting team included Milt Herd, Herd Planning and Design; Karen Gavrilovic, Paradigm Design; and Martha Mason Semmes, Town Planner/Zoning Administrator, Middleburg,, Virginia.

9. Copies of the newsletter are available in pdf format, upon request, from the Montgomery County Planning Department

updated baseline data for planning decisions. To this end, the graduate Environmental Planning Studio in the Urban Affairs and Planning Program at Virginia Tech developed a “test” chapter covering agriculture, open space, and water related concerns, along with a list of possible indicators, including data sources and an update schedule. Their finished work was presented to the Planning Commission in December, 2002. (10)

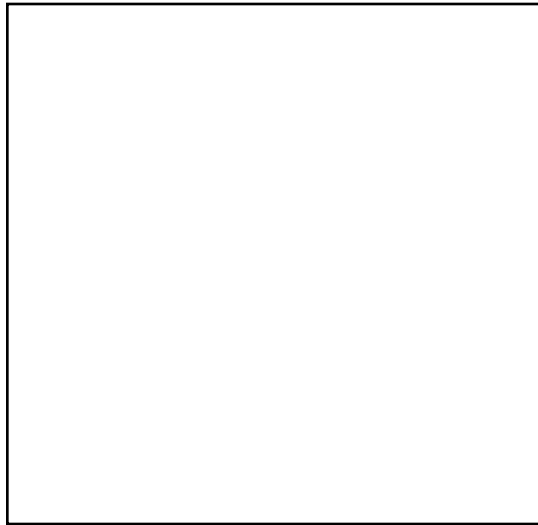
10. The Virginia Tech project final report is available in pdf format, upon request, from the Montgomery County Planning Department.

Phase IV: The Community Facilitators Initiative and Community Survey (11)

Planning for the Community Facilitators Initiative & Community Survey comprehensive planning process started in September, 2002, while implementation of the project began in January, 2003. The Community Facilitator's Initiative was introduced to address the need for broad based community participation. Although hampered by bad weather, the initiative did receive support from the different communities in Montgomery County.

The initiative relied on the redefinition of community from the more traditional definition based on geography to one based on resident interactions and connections (social, civic, political, religious, cultural, community, and commercial organizations) within the broader

11. The Community Facilitators Initiative & Community Survey were successful because of the all of the members of the community and all of the community groups who were involved. Special acknowledgment, however, needs to be made to certain individuals for reaching out to multiple groups and encouraging a broad range of involvement in their communities. The Montgomery County Planning Department wishes to thank all of the participants and volunteers, including: Ellen and Gary Harkrader; Mr. Fred Morton, Dr. Kitty Rogers, the Montgomery County School Board and the faculty, staff, and students of the Montgomery County Public Schools; Beth Obenshain of the New River Valley Land Trust; Mike Ewing (for web survey advice); the Ruritan; Penny Franklin and the Community Group; Fred Lawson; and John Moore. While the weather did not particularly cooperate (a large number of winter storms discouraged greater participation in the Community Survey), the Initiative garnered 826 community survey responses to date and responses are still trickling in. The student survey generated an additional 512 responses. An additional 27 letters, addressing some of the issues, but not attached to a survey, were submitted, as were 13 group survey flipcharts. In addition, we wish to thank Dr. Diane Zahm and her Land Use Planning Class (Urban Affairs & Planning Department, Virginia Tech) for crunching all of the map data. Finally, a special thank you to Carol Lindstrom, a volunteer from Echostar, who input all of the quantitative and qualitative data into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and spent more than a few days creating mounds of charts, graphs, and frequency tables.



community, not just their particular neighborhood. Part of the impetus for this approach was a recognition of the validity of Alexis de Tocqueville's observation of the American character: "Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of dispositions are forever forming associations." (12) Low turnouts at prior comprehensive plan community meetings suggested that few Montgomery County residents were either engaged in or interested in issues surrounding County planning.

Staff from the Planning Department contacted community organizations and pitched greater community participation in the comprehensive planning process. Each organization was asked to provide one member who would be willing to function as a community facilitator, someone who could facilitate a comprehensive plan input session during one of the organizations regularly scheduled meetings during January and February, 2003. The survey was designed with these input sessions in mind. The facilitator

12. Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. ed. J.P. Mayer. Garden City, NJ. 1969 pg. 515.

would distribute the survey to the members, at the meeting, would help members fill out the survey and a group response flip chart, collect the materials at the end of the meeting, and return the materials to the Planning Department within a specific timeframe.

Montgomery County experienced one of the worst winters in many years. Schools were not the only ones affected by the weather. Meetings were canceled, churches closed, and much of the normal routine for a great many people was disrupted. The organizations that did meet often had smaller than expected attendance. Despite the weather, 68 different organizations (geographic, educational, civic, cultural, social, commercial, and religious), representing a broad cross section of the county population, participated. Surveys were also distributed to the different realty companies and mailed out to the members of the Chamber of Commerce.(13)

In addition, the County made a special effort to reach out to minority organizations and underrepresented populations, including African American churches and organizations, as well as other minority, senior, and youth organizations. By the end of the process, the Community Facilitators Initiative and Community Survey generated 826 adult surveys, 512 student surveys, 13 group surveys, 27 letters, and 10,200 written comments. Of those who completed the survey, 75% were first time participants in the comprehensive planning process. (14) (15)

13. A full list of the participating organizations is included in the final report for the Community Facilitators Initiative and Community Survey, available in pdf format from the Montgomery County Planning Department.

14. This effort was recognized by the Virginia Chapter of the American Planning Association, which awarded the County the VAPA Public Awareness award in April, 2004.

15. Because the results from the Community Facilitators Initiative and Community Survey are included in the opening introductions for individual chapters, an overview of the results has not been included in this introduction. The final report, survey construction and methodology, and full data are available in pdf format, upon request, from the Montgomery County Planning Department.

Phase V: Citizen Work Groups (16)

Starting with a kickoff session in May, 2003, citizen work groups began work on the goals, objectives, and strategies for *Montgomery County, 2025*. Many of the individuals who volunteered as community facilitators also volunteered for the citizen work groups. In addition, citizens with special knowledge of or interest in particular issues also volunteered. (17) Finally, individual

16. A full list of the work group participants is included in the appendix.

17. The citizen participants in the work groups brought a wide range of expertise to the process. Three members of the Montgomery County School Board served on the cultural facilities and education work group, as did a specialist in historic preservation and tourism; the Economic Development Commission participated in the development of the economic resources chapter; representatives from the local caving organization and an employee of the U.S. Forest Service served on the environmental work group; the parks and recreation chapter was generated by citizens and members of the Parks and Recreation Commission; members of the development community served on the government and planning work group, as well as the Utilities Committee, the Fire and Rescue Task Force worked with citizens on the public safety work group, and members of the Public Service Authority participated in the utilities work group.

Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeal members were assigned to each work group to help facilitate the meetings.

An initial list of goals for each chapter, based, primarily on citizen comments included in the survey responses, was provided to each work group. A total of nine groups, covering 12 topics, met multiple times between May and August, to review and revise the individual chapters included in this plan.

Phase VI: Planning Commission Work Sessions.

From September to December, the individual work groups presented their initial list of goals, objectives, and policies to the Planning Commission, during work sessions, for feedback and further discussion. Individual chapters were revised following each session, and the Planning Commission received a full draft of the goals, objectives, and strategies in December of 2003.

From January of 2004 through April, 2004, the Planning Commission reviewed each of the chapters for a second time, along with the preliminary drafts of the chapter introductions. The first full draft of the plan was presented to

the Planning Commission in May, 2004 and to the Board of Supervisors in June, 2004. The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the draft plan on June 30, 2004. The Planning Commission recommended the plan to the Board of Supervisors on August 11, 2004. The Board of Supervisors held a public hearing on September 27, 2004. On October 12, 2004, the Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted the new comprehensive plan without amendment.

Implementing the Comprehensive Plan

According to the Code of Virginia, “the comprehensive plan shall recommend methods of implementation and shall include a current map of the area covered by the comprehensive plan” (§15.2-2224). In addition, the Code lists a variety of tools Montgomery County can use to implement the new comprehensive plan, including: “a capital improvements program, a subdivision ordinance, a zoning ordinance and zoning district maps” (§15.2-2224).

Primary Implementation Methods

The Capital Improvements Program

According to §15.2-2239 of the Code of Virginia:

“A local planning commission may, and at the direction of the governing body shall, prepare and revise annually a capital improvement program based on the comprehensive plan of the locality for a period not to exceed the ensuing five years. The commission shall submit the program

annually to the governing body, or to the chief administrative officer or other official charged with preparation of the budget for the locality, at such time as it or he shall direct. The capital improvement program shall include the commission's recommendations, and estimates of cost of the facilities and the means of financing them, to be undertaken in the ensuing fiscal year and in a period not to exceed the next four years, as the basis of the capital budget for the locality. In the preparation of its capital budget recommendations, the commission shall consult with the chief administrative officer or other executive head of the government of the locality, the heads of departments and interested citizens and organizations and shall hold such public hearings as it deems necessary.”

Montgomery County currently has a capital improvements program (CIP), however the program will need to be reviewed and revised in order to bring it into compliance both with the Code of Virginia and with the new comprehensive plan. (18)

The Subdivision Ordinance:

As noted in the introduction to this section, the subdivision ordinance is cited as one of the four primary methods of implementing the comprehensive plan. The current Montgomery County Subdivision Ordinance was revised in 1994 and, as with the CIP, will need to be reviewed and revised to bring it into compliance with the provisions in the new comprehensive plan.

18. The 15.2-2232 Review process, discussed at the end of this section, would help strengthen the current CIP process by establishing a project's compliance early on.

A Zoning Ordinance and Zoning District Maps

Under the Code of Virginia, the zoning ordinance is one of the primary planning tools used to implement the comprehensive plan. According to the Code, the purpose of zoning ordinances is to promote “the health, safety or general welfare of the public” (§15.2-2283) and “to improve the public health, safety, convenience and welfare of its citizens and to plan for the future development of communities to the end that transportation systems be carefully planned; that new community centers be developed with adequate highway, utility, health, educational, and recreational facilities; that the need for mineral resources and the needs of agriculture, industry and business be recognized in future growth; that residential areas be provided with healthy surroundings for family life; that agricultural and forestal land be preserved; and that the growth of the community be consonant with the efficient and economical use of public funds” (§15.2-2200). In addition, the Code of Virginia states that zoning ordinances shall consider, where appropriate, the following:

- (i) to provide for adequate light, air, convenience of access, and safety from fire, flood, crime and other dangers;
- (ii) to reduce or prevent congestion in the public streets;
- (iii) to facilitate the creation of a convenient, attractive and harmonious community;
- (iv) to facilitate the provision of adequate police and fire protection, disaster evacuation, civil defense, transportation, water, sewerage, flood protection, schools, parks, forests, playgrounds, recreational facilities, airports and other public requirements;
- (v) to protect against destruction of or

Preliminary Comparison of Comprehensive Plan Designations and Current Zoning Districts

	A-1	C-1	R-R	R1	R2	R3	RM-1	PMR	CB	GB
Resource Stewardship										
Rural										
Rural Communities										
Residential Transition (1)				W&S	W&S			W&S		
Village Expansion				W&S	W&S	W&S	W&S	W&S	W&S	W&S
Villages				W&S	W&S	W&S	W&S		W&S	W&S
Urban Expansion				W&S	W&S	W&S	W&S	W&S	W&S	W&S

Notes:

1. Higher density residential (R1, R2) is allowed in Residential Transition areas if the proposed site is served by public water and sewer.
2. The M-1, M-L, PIN, PUD-RES, and PUD-COM districts in the Zoning Ordinance will need to be modified to reflect the Villages, Village Expansion, and Urban Expansion areas.

- encroachment upon historic areas;
- (vi) to protect against one or more of the following: overcrowding of land, undue density of population in relation to the community facilities existing or available, obstruction of light and air, danger and congestion in travel and transportation, or loss of life, health, or property from fire, flood, panic or other dangers;
- (vii) to encourage economic development activities that provide desirable employment and enlarge the tax base;
- (viii) to provide for the preservation of agricultural and forestal lands and other lands of significance for the protection of the natural environment;
- (ix) to protect approach slopes and other safety areas of licensed airports, including United States government and military air facilities; and
- (x) to promote the creation and preservation of affordable housing suitable for meeting the current and future needs of the locality as well as a reasonable proportion of the current and future needs of the planning district within which the locality is situated. Such ordinance may also include reasonable

provisions, not inconsistent with applicable state water quality standards, to protect surface water and ground water as defined in § 62.1-255. (§15.2-2283)

Many of the provisions in the Code of Virginia are reflected both in this comprehensive plan and in the existing zoning ordinance, adopted in 1999. In addition, the land use designations included in *Montgomery County, 2025* fit reasonably well with the zoning districts in the existing ordinance. This said, the County will need to review and revise the existing zoning ordinance to bring it into compliance with the new plan and provide mechanism for implementing portions of the new plan.

Additional Implementation Tools

The Community Indicators Program

Community indicators are generally defined as a set of qualitative and quantitative measures, some objective and others subjective, which provide localities with the means of tracking quality of life, plan implementation, and progress. They can be used to measure the well-being in the community, be it economic,

environmental, social, or cultural. In comprehensive planning, community indicators provide a mechanism for tracking the success, or failure, of programs and policies. For example, if the goal is to retain open space, possible indicators of success might include the number of acres in agricultural and forestal districts, acres placed under conservation easements, or the number of acres of farmland taken out of production. If the goal is to improve water quality, indicators might include annual Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) data for specific streams or the number of old or failing septic systems within a specific watershed in any given year. If the goal is to increase civic involvement, indicators might include public hearing or voter participation rates.

While indicator programs are generally tied to comprehensive plans and managed through planning and development departments, they require annual participation across department lines, especially in data collection and application. A formal, GIS-based, indicators program could aid the County in determining critical needs and priorities, while also providing the public with an annual assessment of the both plan implementation and quality of life.

A preliminary list of indicators has been included in the subject chapters of this plan (19);

however, the County may need to appoint a citizens advisory committee (CAC), working with staff and elected and appointed officials, to establish a more formal indicators program for the County.

Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee

Under the Code of Virginia (15.2-2221[8]), the Planning Commission shall “if deemed advisable, establish an advisory committee or committees.” Montgomery County has a history of using citizen advisory committees, made up of a combination of citizens (stakeholders), appointed and elected officials, and County staff. Depending on the needs of the county, the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee, in conjunction with the Planning Commission, could be charged with overseeing the implementation process, (preliminary annual work program recommendations), establishing the indicators program, and/or assessing the County’s progress. In order to establish a Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee, the County will need to: 1) clearly establish the purpose and responsibilities of the committee; 2) establish specific guidelines for the committee’s tasks; and 3) appoint a committee that represents the County’s broad range of stakeholders.

Annual “State of the Plan” Report.

19. The indicators are incorporated into the introductions for each chapter and a table is included in the Appendix A.

According to the Code of Virginia (§15.2-2221[5-6]), the Planning Commission “shall prepare, publish and distribute reports, ordinances and other materials related to its activities” [6] and “make recommendations and an annual report to the governing body concerning the operation of the commission and the status of planning within its jurisdiction”[5].

Annual reports on the comprehensive plan take a number of different forms: a checklist of the previous year’s goals and accomplishments, a newsletter, an annual databook, or a narrative summary. In general, annual reports could to accomplish three things: 1) provide an annual assessment of planning and plan implementation; 2) provide an annual strategic plan for implementation; and 3) if an indicator program is established, provide an annual assessment of the jurisdiction’s quality of life in the form of a databook. Annual reports need to provide an honest assessment of progress in order to maintain citizens’ faith in the process.

The Planning Commission’s annual report, *News and Notes*, could be expanded to provide space for additional implementation information and indicator data.

15.2-2232 Reviews.

One method of establishing the County’s compliance with the Comprehensive Plan is the 2232 Review Process. Under the Code of Virginia:

Whenever a local planning commission

recommends a comprehensive plan or part thereof for the locality and such plan has been approved and adopted by the governing body, it shall control the general or approximate location, character and extent of each feature shown on the plan. Thereafter, unless a feature is already shown on the adopted master plan or part thereof or is deemed so under subsection D, no street or connection to an existing street, park or other public area, public building or public structure, public utility facility or public service corporation facility other than railroad facility, whether publicly or privately owned, shall be constructed, established or authorized, unless and until the general location or approximate location, character, and extent thereof has been submitted to and approved by the commission as being substantially in accord with the adopted comprehensive plan or part thereof.

2232 Reviews are an important tool for determining the compliance of public projects, especially those included in the County’s Capital Improvements Program (CIP). The 2232 Review mechanism provides an important analytical tool for the Planning Commission and the County in the planning and budgeting processes and could be incorporated into the CIP application process.

Comprehensive plans are not and should not

Amending and Updating the Comprehensive Plan

be static documents. The amendment and revision of the plan, given the importance of the document and the time consuming nature of the process, should not be done in a piecemeal fashion or for the convenience of a few at the detriment of the larger goals or the common good. Changes produce impacts, and those impacts should be carefully considered prior to amending or updating the plan. This said, plans should not be considered written in stone, nor fixed in time or policy. As the County changes, so too should the plan. Policies which do not accomplish what they need to should be rethought and changed. Objectives reached should be replaced by new objectives. The County must keep an eye on the long-term goals while assessing the impact of current, and often rapidly changing, conditions. In short, the comprehensive plan should be considered a living document that can and should be revised when necessary and appropriate.

Amending the Comprehensive Plan

According to the Code of Virginia, once the comprehensive plan is adopted, the Board of Supervisors must recommend, approve, and adopt any amendments or changes to the Plan, only after directing “the local planning commission to prepare an amendment and submit it to public hearing within sixty days” of the Board of Supervisors request (15.2-2229). In addition, both the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors are required to publish, two weeks in advance of public hearings, the

proposed changes and the purpose of the proposed changes. Additional requirements apply if the proposed changes are adjacent to other jurisdictions.

The Board of Supervisors, in consultation with the Planning Commission, should establish an amendment process that considers Planning Commission and staff resources and considers the impact of amendments on the overall comprehensive plan and the County’s adopted goals.

Updating the Comprehensive Plan

Under the guidelines set forth in the State Code, jurisdictions must review their comprehensive plans at least once every five years. The timeframe for review can be shorter (i.e. yearly, every two years, three years, or four years), but it can not extend beyond five years. The mandatory review provision is meant to insure that comprehensive plans continue to have some currency and are not just shelved upon completion. In addition to reviewing the comprehensive plan, the Planning Commission may choose to “make a study of the public facilities, including existing facilities such as [water and sewer facilities, schools, public safety facilities, streets, and highways], which would be needed if the plan were fully implemented” (§15/2/2230.1).

Rather than adopt a fixed-five year review schedule, this comprehensive plan is designed to use a staggered review schedule. While the overall goals are meant to cover the next twenty

years, the objectives, strategies, and policies are not. Specific strategies and policies are meant to be reviewed on a two year revolving basis; objectives should be reviewed and revised, at a minimum, every four years. As with the amendment process, the Board of Supervisors, in consultation with the Planning Commission, should establish a process of updating the comprehensive plan

